

January 1953

Volume 32

Number 369

LABOUR ORGANISER

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The Birmingham and District Co-operative Party invite applications for the post of full-time Secretary. Applicants should have a sound knowledge of the Co-operative Movement and experience in election organisation. Applications must be delivered not later than 16th January, 1953, to W. E. Wheeldon, 164 High Street, Deritend, Birmingham 12, from whom further particulars may be obtained.

SWINDON C.L.P. — Applications are invited for the post of full-time Secretary/Agent. Salary and conditions in accordance with the National Agreement. Application forms from W. A. Dixon, C.C., 28 Milton Road, Swindon, to whom they must be returned not later than the 28th January, 1953.

SALISBURY C.L.P. Applications are invited for the post of Secretary/Agent. Salary and conditions in accordance with National Agreement. Application forms from Mr. F. C. Shepherd, The Labour Hall, Three Swans' Yard, Winchester Street, Salisbury, Wiltshire, to be returned not later than 7th February, 1953.

HITCHIN C.L.P. (which includes Stevenage New Town) invites applications for post of Secretary-Agent. Appointment in accordance with National Agreement. Application forms from Councillor M. Davison, 55 Willow Way, Letchworth, Herts., to whom they must be returned by 30th January, 1953.



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JANUARY, 1953

PRICE FIVEPENCE

HALF A MILLION MEMBERS MISSING

IF the Labour Party lost over half a million of its members in a single year a terrific furore would be made in the 'popular' press. There appears to have been a drop of this magnitude in Tory membership, but this has not produced even a down-the-page paragraph in any newspaper.

It was reported to the 1949 Tory conference that the party membership was over 2,500,000, and a year later a membership of 2,763,968 was claimed. In October last, both the *News Chronicle* and the *Evening News*, announcing a Tory Central Office scheme of money prizes to parties recruiting most members, quoted Tory membership to be about 2,250,000. This heavy falling away is to be contrasted with the rapid growth of membership in recent years.

The individual membership of the Labour Party has been much more stable. The year following the electoral victory of 1945 it was 645,345, and it is not surprising that the following year there was a loss of 37,000. This loss was nearly made up in 1948, and in 1949 there was a further increase of 100,000.

In 1950, as a result of special effort, individual membership reached the all-time record of 908,161. In 1951 there was a fall, the second since the end of the war, this time of 32,000. The figures for 1952 are expected to show a substantial increase, but it is not expected that they will reach the million mark.

The Labour Agent for Lanark is entitled to criticise the Party's membership effort (see page 12). It is too much to expect that all Constituency Labour Parties should have over 5,000 members, as Lanark has, but many of them could do very much better than they have done in past years.

No doubt a national membership officer could do much to stimulate the laggards, but it is doubtful if such an appointment really can be justified. The national organising staff already is persuading, cajoling and bullying Constituency Labour Parties to bring in new members. Their best weapon is the example of parties, such as Lanark, which have shown what can be done when the value of individual membership is recognised locally.

IS TOO MUCH NOTICE TAKEN OF RURAL AREAS?

THREE is a tendency to confuse 'rural' with 'marginal', as witness certain Conference resolutions which have appeared from time to time. In fact, there are 39 boroughs with majorities of less than two thousand as against 36 counties.

In a recent article, every constituency mentioned as lost because of the Postal Vote was a borough, and in the past two elections the Postal Vote in Labour-held boroughs was notoriously low compared with Tory-held boroughs, or with counties. The average poll in the big cities was much lower than for the rest of the country.

Individual membership shows the same picture. Last year there were 16 constituencies with the minimum of 240 individual members. Ten of these were in big cities and only two in counties. Can it be that our organisational structure is at fault?

In the average county constituency there may be twenty or more Party units, each with its quota of officers and each in direct touch with Transport House. But is a village of less than a thousand electors really more important than a ward of over twenty thousand?

Even within the cities, a Women's Section or small League of Youth branch will receive communications from Head Office, but a Ward Committee with several hundred members will not. A large city like Glasgow, embracing fifteen constituencies, has barely a score of contacts with Transport House, while a single county constituency may have twice that number.

Important communications go only to secretaries of Constituency Labour Parties, which meet monthly. This results in delay and, in any case, delegates cannot be expected to report back accurately the contents of several double foolscap circulars, which have been read to them.

The constitution of many large boroughs does not encourage organisation on a polling district basis, yet if we really mean to do more business we must open more branches.

A thorough re-examination of our organisation is necessary. The position of secretary in a large Ward must be given

a new dignity commensurate with its importance. Meanwhile, those with an electorate of (say) over ten thousand should immediately be placed on the mailing list for those vital circulars from the National Agent's Department, on Registration, Postal Voting and similar subjects.

J. M. SMITH

THE linking of rural and marginal constituencies in the minds of Party members is because both types are in need of special attention. The marginal constituency because improved organisation and a little more effort might make all the difference between winning and losing the seat: the rural constituency because our comrades labour under such difficult conditions, both socially and physically.

There has been a steady development in Party organisation on the country-side and support for Labour has grown election by election since the war. Things move slowly in the country, but this has its advantages. Once country areas are won for Labour, it is unlikely that they will be lost as easily as some marginal constituencies in the towns.

The inclusion of Ward Committees in Head Office circularisation is in the first place conditioned by its practicability. Excluding Ward Committees a general circularisation takes in 9,000 bodies. The task of keeping names and addresses up to date is terrific: if many thousands of Ward Committees were added it would become almost impossible.

Another consideration is that a Local Labour Party in a county area very often works in isolation or, at least, has only tenuous links with its Constituency Labour Party. That is the reason it receives communications direct from Head Office. Many rural constituencies can only manage a quarterly meeting of the General Committee, and some even less than that.

On the other hand most Labour Parties in towns have monthly meetings of the General Committee so that intimate contact is maintained with the Ward Committees.

EDITOR.

Forming a Study Group

by

GEORGE WRIGHT, Labour Party Education Officer

ALL who have had experience of ward meetings will agree that they are not the brightest of the Party's efforts. Anything which tends to brighten them will be an asset.

Both the ward and the local party meetings lend themselves to the development of party education. The first essential is some streamlining of the agenda. This ought to be possible if the Executive first examines the business for the meeting and then submits its recommendations. Careful handling by the chairman could result in many of the recommendations being adopted.

Business would be further expedited if it could be agreed that no item should appear on the agenda unless first it had been submitted to the Executive Committee. There should be some scope for emergency resolutions, but care must be taken to ensure that any such resolution is related to a situation which has suddenly developed and needs immediate attention. Such situations are not likely to arise frequently.

Also, it is worthwhile considering the possibility of a standing order limiting the business time of the meeting. In the event of such a standing order being adopted, it should not be possible to suspend it by an ordinary majority decision. A two-thirds, or three-quarters, majority is needed to make suspension more difficult.

If these suggestions are adopted, there would be a considerable amount of time saved, which could then be devoted to Party education.

Political Education Officer

For the expansion and development of Party education the appointment of a political education officer is a necessity, for the very simple reason that unless someone is responsible for the work, it is unlikely effectively to be carried out.

Great care must be exercised in the appointment of the political education officer. Should this office get into the hands of people whose sympathies lie more

outside the Party than in it, disastrous consequences could follow.

Among the functions of the political education officer are the planning of a programme of educational activity on a local basis; indicating the sources of information available, and compiling a list of local speakers. As an alternative to speakers, the possibilities of converting the meeting into a discussion group should be examined. It ought to be possible with the existing talent in the Movement to find people locally capable of opening a discussion.

If the subject for discussion is chosen well beforehand and members can be induced to read the pamphlet concerned, then there are possibilities of a reasonable discussion taking place.

More Canvassing

By training discussion group leaders, we may very well increase the number of public speakers available to the Party. Also, policy discussion may help to increase the number of canvassers. It is possible that many of our members are deterred from going on the knocker because they are aware of a lack of knowledge of policy matters and are afraid of meeting awkward questions.

Much more attention should be given to the type of notice sent out to advertise meetings. The title of the lecture or discussion should be simple and attractive. A title like 'The Budget and the Housewife', or 'The Budget and the Workers', will be much more attractive than 'The Social and Economic Implications of the Budget'.

It is inadvisable to choose too wide a topic. Topics like the social services and foreign policy for single lectures cover far too wide a field. It would be better if the main titles were broken down into a series of sub-headings and several meetings organised under the major title. A single chapter in one of the Party's discussion pamphlets will often provide a wide enough basis for a short discussion.

The functions of the Parliamentary Labour Party and its place
in the general structure of the Party reviewed by
JOHN TAYLOR, M.P.

LABOUR IN PARLIAMENT

WHEN the Tory press builds up an argument based on an entirely false conception of the powers and duties of a piece of Labour Party machinery, we can regard the episode as an exhibition of ignorance or of deliberate misrepresentation.

When members of the Party do the same thing, we ought to sit up and take notice for much harm can be done.

For example, most of us have read wedge-driving articles in Tory papers, designed to do one or more of three things: (a) to exaggerate divergencies of opinion into yawning chasms of factional alignments, (b) to manufacture a 'split' where none exists, or (c) to create misgiving and despondency among Party supporters.

The Parliamentary Labour Party has been a specially fertile field for the rotation of crops of this type of article in that type of paper. Dozens of articles have been written debiting the Parliamentary Labour Party with purposes far beyond its scope and crediting it with powers it does not possess.

'Our Parliamentary Correspondent' and 'Our Political Correspondent' have recently been having a high old time churning out highly coloured stories, written with that air of special inside knowledge which is the chief stock in trade of such writers. According to them, the Parliamentary Labour Party has been having 'important debates on future Party policy', during which 'fundamental differences of opinion' were exposed. Or certain decisions of the Parliamentary Labour Party 'prove' that 'a wide split' is developing between the Members of Parliament and 'the constituencies'. And so on, *ad absurdum*.

So long as these frivolities are confined to the Tory press they need cause our adrenal glands no overtime. Let them indulge in their pipe dreams if they will. They do us no great harm. On the contrary they often are to our advantage in the long run.

Political journalists develop an amazing capacity for turning their own slender conjectures into established facts in their own minds. They see permanent trends in a single by-election result. They build up card castles which appear to them to have all the solidity of steel and concrete.

When their ramshackle erections disintegrate with the first breath of reality, they are not one whit disconcerted. With sublime faith they seek for some shifting sand on which to lay the foundations of another. This is one of their most endearing qualities. Meanwhile we benefit from their under-ratings.

But when Party members ask questions or make speeches at Party meetings based on the same misconceptions, it would be folly to ignore them. Such speeches and questions would never be uttered if the structure and powers of the Parliamentary Labour Party were more widely understood.

It seems that although practically every member has some idea of what the Parliamentary Labour Party is, few know what it does, what it can do and what it is quite unable to do. Thus an outline of these things is justified.

Here it is. The Parliamentary Labour Party consists of all Labour Members of Parliament who receive the Labour whip. Every Labour candidate who is elected either at a general, or at a by-election, automatically becomes a member of the Parliamentary Labour Party and should attend its meetings, though he or she is not forced to do so.

Every person who is selected as a Labour Candidate by any constituency Labour Party undertakes at the time of selection and *as a condition of selection* to accept the Standing Orders of the Parliamentary Labour Party and to act in harmony with them if elected. Indeed, this undertaking is personally signed by every person nominated as a Labour Candidate.

The chief thing to keep in mind about the Parliamentary Labour Party is that it is NOT a policy-making body. Policy can only be decided by Annual Conference. The Parliamentary Labour

Party's sole job is to try to transform Annual Conference decisions into Acts of Parliament when Labour is in power, and to advocate these decisions as the alternative to the bills before the House when we are in Opposition. That's all. It has no other powers. It has no additional authority.

Therefore, there can be no division inside the Parliamentary Labour Party on matters of general policy. Of course, there are different opinions at times on matters of detailed approach. Whether a bill should be approached by a direct negative, or by a reasoned amendment, can produce quite a lively discussion. Whether a set of circumstances merits a vote of censure, or whether such a vote should more wisely await a more important subject, can create a heated discussion. But if the Party policy has been clearly laid down, divisions on that policy are impossible.

It is only when policy on a subject currently before the House has not been clearly defined by Conference, or when policy on that subject is in the process of formation, that discussions on policy interpretation could arise. In practice they very seldom do.

It will thus be seen that newspaper talk about the Parliamentary Party being at loggerheads with the constituency parties is so much nonsense.

Those newspapers which specialise in nonsense try to nurture this idea. Look, they say, constituency Party representatives at Morecambe put Nye Bevan at the top of the poll for the Party Executive. Members of Parliament put him at the bottom for the 'Shadow Cabinet'. Therefore the constituency Parties are at loggerheads with the Members of Parliament. A split. A chasm. A nuclear fission!

Bull! Pedigree, grass-fed bull! There is not the remotest analogy between the National Executive Committee and the Committee of the Parliamentary Labour Party. The first is charged by Annual Conference with complete inter-conference authority to control and manage the entire Party. The second is merely a committee which deals with the technicalities of the Party's activities in Parliament.

It is not even called an Executive because it has very little real executive authority. It can act on matters of detail and of urgency, but on matters of importance it must, if time permits, receive the approval of the full Parlia-

mentary Labour Party meeting. Time usually does permit, for M.P.s are easily called together at short notice.

The Parliamentary Labour Party is very similar to the Labour Group on a local authority. It serves broadly the same functions. It has similar Standing Orders. Its duties are somewhat more complex because Parliament meets five days a week and has numerous committees. Also because parliamentary procedure is more complicated than the procedure of a local authority.

The committee of the Parliamentary Labour Party, picturesquely called the 'Shadow Cabinet', consists of three officers and twelve other members. The officers are, the chairman or leader (who becomes the Prime Minister when the Party attains power and Leader of the Opposition when it does not); the vice-chairman, or deputy leader, and the Chief Whip. Nominations for all 15 positions are invited and any member of the Parliamentary Labour Party may nominate any other member for any position, with his or her consent. Voting is by postal ballot.

The chairman of the Parliamentary Labour Party becomes an ex-officio member of the National Executive Committee of the Party and is the only member of that committee who is not directly elected by Annual Conference.

(To be concluded)

Candidates Endorsed

THE following were endorsed as Prospective Parliamentary Candidates at the November meeting of the National Executive Committee:

Wallasey	...	...	Mr. Fred. F. Jarvis
Petersfield	...	...	Mr. F. R. Mason
Ormskirk	...	...	Mr. J. A. Walsh
Horncastle	...	...	Mr. W. Pashby
Camberwell	...	...
Dulwich	...	...	Mr. W. Vernon
Lewisham West	...	...	Mr. T. Sargent
Brentford and	...	...
Chiswick	...	...	Mr. A. W. Filson
Tynemouth	...	...	Mr. G. D. Kennan
Chertsey	...	...	Mr. D. S. F. Warth
Thirsk and Malton	...	...	Mr. B. Bateman
Shipley	...	...	Mr. E. Gardner
York	...	...	Mr. T. E. M. McKitterick
Edinburgh South	...	...	Mr. J. A. Forsyth
Roxburgh and	...	...
Selkirk	...	...	Mr. L. A. Morrison

A WOMAN'S WORK

by a Staff Journalist

THE first article in this series describing the Press and Publicity Department, intimated further articles about the other departments of Head Office—'Secretarial, Organisation, Research, International, Accounts, etc.'. The Women's Department—or, to use the correct name, The Chief Woman Officer's Department—was the 'et cetera'! It is one of the seven administrative Departments of Head Office.

The Department came into existence along with the 1918 Party Constitution, which introduced individual membership and provided for the establishment of Constituency Labour Parties, which were given the responsibility of enrolling individual members and creating and maintaining an effective electoral organisation.

Provision was also made for the organisation of women members in Women's Sections and a Department was set up at Head Office, charged with the supervision and development of this work, under Dr. Marion Phillips as Chief Woman Officer.

At the time there were a few people who had doubts about this development—was it safe to allow women to meet by themselves for political discussion without masculine supervision? But the record has more than justified the foresight of those who realised that the Party must surely gain in strength and stability by providing facilities, within the Constitution, for women members to give service to the movement over and above what could be done through the general Party machinery.

The zeal and determination of the women leaders of 35 years ago was reinforced by the vision and political wisdom of Arthur Henderson, Party Secretary and architect of the 1918 Constitution, who remained not only generous, but invariably just, in his appreciation of the great contribution made by the women's organisation.

On the untimely death of Marion Phillips in 1932, Mary Sutherland became Chief Woman Officer. Her Department maintains direct contact with the Women's Sections (there are now over 2,300 throughout the country), 250 Women's Constitu-

ency Committees and Federations, and 73 Labour Women's Advisory Councils.

A single day's post will bring letters from sections on such diverse matters as the relationship between a new ward section and the General Committee of the Party, the implications of the Party's policy on aid to under-developed territories, arranging a deputation to a Borough Council on Old People's Homes, suitable short plays for a drama group, the distribution of fish, planning a summer propaganda campaign.

Every letter from a Women's Section receives an individual reply, however unimportant it may seem to be. It is a first principle to remember that all the hard slogging work of our women's organisations is done by voluntary workers who make sacrifices in order to do it, and there are no stereotyped acknowledgments of their letters.

A letter of welcome is sent to every new Section and to every new Secretary, and several times a year a circular letter goes to all women's organisations—dealing with organisation matters, educational programmes and other Party and political questions as occasion requires.

From time to time special women's campaigns are arranged, and, in future, the Department will be actively concerned with plans for 'Women's Week' which Sections are asked to organise in early summer.

There is a good deal of correspondence with Party Secretaries and Agents as well as with Sections on questions of women's work and organisation.

But the most vital link between the Department and the local women's organisations is the organiser in the field. There is regular correspondence and consultation with the eleven Women Organisers about work in the regions. Their weekly reports are studied with special care for they keep Head Office informed not only about the state of organisation in the constituencies where visits have been paid, but about the views of ordinary members on political affairs.

Another link between the Department

and the local women's organisation is the recently established National Women's Advisory Committee.

In the months before the National Conference of Labour Women, the staff works at terrific pressure, for all Conference arrangements must be carried through to a timetable—invitations, agendas, Report of the Year's Work, supervision of the Local Hospitality Committee, credentials, Press notices, and the editing of the Conference Report.

Then *Labour Woman* must be produced every month. All the work of editing, noting orders and despatch of quarterly accounts, etc., is done in the Department.

The Chief Woman Officer acts as correspondent on all matters relating to the Women's Committee of the Socialist International. This involves, in addition to attending Committee meetings once or twice a year, the preparation of reports and memoranda for the Committee.

Contact is maintained with the Women's Committees of Labour and Socialist Parties in other countries; and in the course of the year many requests from Parties in Europe and the Commonwealth for advice and information about the organisation of women are dealt with.

The Chief Woman Officer has for many years been elected Secretary of the Standing Joint Committee of Working Women's Organisations. The Party has eight representatives on the S.J.C., whose work is greatly valued by the Women's Sections.

The work would have to be done in the Department if the S.J.C. did not exist, in order to meet the need of the Women's Sections for information and guidance on the many questions of vital interest to their members which come within the province of the S.J.C.: for example, the care of ineducable children, which has been given detailed study in the past two years, and provision for maternity under the National Health Service, the subject of an enquiry at present.

The work of the S.J.C. involves much correspondence with Government Departments, the preparation of memoranda for Government Committees, and the study of official papers and Parliamentary questions and debates.

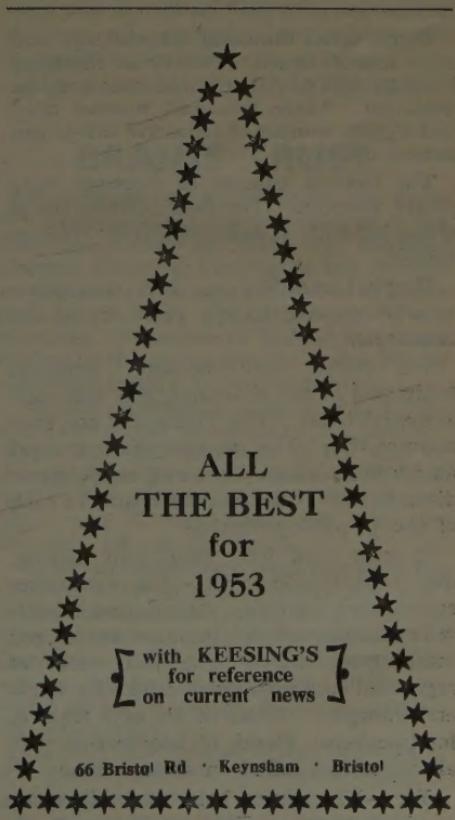
Every week interviews have to be fitted in—Party and Section officers, candidates and M.P.s, social workers, students of politics, councillors, magistrates, or visitors from overseas. An effort is made to spare time for everyone with a

genuine reason for a visit to the Department.

There are other jobs which the Department takes in its stride: a brief for a local speaker who has rashly promised to speak on some 'women's question' on which he or she knows nothing, the occasional preparation of discussion notes for Sections on a question of special interest to women members, articles for local Labour journals, Press queries—and other et ceteras.

There is a staff of four in the Department: the secretary to the Chief Woman Officer and three clerical assistants, and they are never under-employed.

Ever since 1918 it has been the consistent policy to urge Sections to regard the political education of their members as one of their main tasks, and as early as the middle 'twenties day schools and classes, residential schools and educational conferences have been a regular feature of women's work in the regions.



HIGH CANVASS : LOW

Organiser

A BY-ELECTION poll of only 46.7 per cent! How did this happen? The candidate was selected on 2nd November, polling-day being on the 27th. The Central Committee Rooms opened on the 5th, four sub-committee rooms the next day, and two others a week later.

Literature was first class. So good was the election address that the *Birmingham Post* said: 'One must admit that for visual appeal and technical merit the Socialist production wins hands down . . . ' and added, 'the Conservative address . . . is too much of a hotch-potch to please the eye'.

Thirty-seven thousand introductory and other leaflets issued. Twenty-six thousand Election Specials distributed over the last week-end. Three thousand window bills, and a good number of attractive silk-screen posters displayed.

The limited number of meetings were poorly attended. The *Daily Herald* did a grand job with its daily reports by Andrew Mellor.

Despite appalling weather canvassers secured records for 74 per cent of the electorate.

We traced two thousand removals (estimated at five thousand) and sent each a special letter. The Tories did not even attempt this. The canvass officer evolved an excellent visual chart to give an immediate picture of the canvass results in each of the 79 polling districts.

It must then have been poor polling-day organisation. Yet — 24 committee rooms were manned. All canvass records were transferred to promise cards and marking-off charts. The full quota of registered cars with many others for workers' transport. Effective use of a team of loudspeakers. Plenty of knockers-up with all supporters called on at least once.

Yet — less than half the electorate troubled to vote. That we improved our

percentage of the total poll from 63.4 per cent to 67 per cent is cold comfort. It was a dull campaign with an apathetic attitude often experienced where previously there was a very high majority.

There's a lesson in the result, but it was certainly not lack of organisation.

H. R. UNDERHILL.
West Midlands.

AGENTS CONFER

AN interesting and, possibly, a far-reaching stage in the development of the agency service has now been taken in London. This is in the emergence of the 'Agents' Conference', composed of all practising constituency agents within the region. The Conference may be residential—a two-and-a-half day conference was recently held at one of the Holiday Fellowship centres—or it may be an afternoon affair held in central London.

In either case the object is the same: to bring to bear the collective wisdom and experience of the agents and regional staff on matters of importance in regional and constituency organisation.

The convening and management of these conferences is the responsibility of the Regional Officer, agents being invited to submit suggestions for the agenda. Preparation of materials, especially of 'Conference Papers' is a very important function of the regional staff in relation to these conferences. These may be purely factual, such as a schedule giving the individual membership of each constituency as a percentage of the Labour vote; or it may be a paper, for discussion, on the best way of getting matters of political significance discussed and decided upon within the constituencies.

Obviously there is much that is educational about this venture. Nevertheless, these gatherings are not 'schools'. They are intended to be, and are, workshops in the production of higher-grade organisation. A useful feature at the residential

ROLL AT SMALL HEATH

Reporting

conferences is the discussion group, led by an Agent appointed for the purpose, which examines in close detail the theory and practice involved in a constituency or regional proposal.

The Executive Committee of the London Labour Party as the regional authority of the Party from time to time refers questions to the Agents' Conference for the views of the agents, before arriving at its decisions. For instance, the last of these conferences was asked to consider the value of the central 16-sheet poster campaign conducted by the London Labour Party at all County Council elections for a good many years past.

The Agents' Conference does not take itself so seriously that its members cannot occasionally have a good laugh at themselves. At the last residential conference Len Maynard, of East Fulham, wrote, produced and played 'How does an Agent spend his Time', or 'One Mad Round of Pleasure'.

London.

J. W. RAISIN.

MOST MARGINAL

RECENTLY I visited Peterborough. Peterborough is our most marginal of marginal constituencies. The Tory majority last time was 373, with a Liberal vote of 2,367. The constituency not only includes the cathedral city of Peterborough, with its large engineering and railway shops, but also some of the most intensively cultivated agricultural land in the country, in addition to some of England's best hunting country. It therefore presents every kind of organising problem.

During my week's stay in the constituency I attended the following meetings—two Women's Sections; the Executive Committee of the Peterborough Labour Party, to which had been invited Ward Officers and Collectors; the officers of the village parties in the south end of the

constituency, and at another meeting, the officers of the village parties in the north end of the constituency. Finally, I attended a meeting of Local Government representatives.

During the day I was able to visit other key people, as many of them are shift workers. The Chairman and the full-time Agent accompanied me on most of my visits, and we were able to examine our organisation very closely and carefully, at ground-floor level, as it were.

At the end of the week, I met constituency officers and had an exchange of views and agreed on lines of action which, we hope, will strengthen our organisation in readiness for the next election.

East Midlands. J. CATTERMOLE.

BRAINS TRUST

AS a result of a discussion on Party Propaganda at a recent meeting of the Northern Group of M.P.s the Regional Council Executive Committee has decided to undertake the organisation of a series of Labour Party Political Brains Trust meetings. These are to be held at various centres in the region and the teams will be composed largely of Northern M.P.s.

The first meeting is to be held at Gateshead Town Hall, on Sunday, 18th January, when Emanuel Shinwell, M.P., will be the Question Master, with Hugh Dalton, M.P., Ted Short, M.P., Dick Ewart, M.P., and County Councillor Mrs. E. Mitchell, J.P., as the Brains.

Other meetings have been arranged for Durham City on 6th February and Darlington on 27th February. It is hoped to arrange others at Middlesbrough and in Cumberland. Of course a different team will be selected in each case, so that as many of our Northern M.P.s as possible are taking part.

This is a new venture in this Region and if it proves successful or otherwise a report will be given in these columns.

Northern. W. B. LEWCOCK.

SOCIAL SECRETARY—NO!

MEMBERSHIP OFFICER WANTED

I READ with interest Len Maynard's article in the November *Organiser*, on keeping the Party lively and happy. Most readers will agree with what he says about the value of social activities and therefore will forgive him for his lapse when he suggests the appointment of a National Social Secretary, without really trying to make out a case for one.

Personally, I believe there is a great need for another national Secretary, but he should be in charge of membership, not socials. At the Morecambe Conference I put forward this suggestion and got the answer 'Only the Constituency Parties can make members'. True, isn't it! Do I follow their example and say at our A.G.M.: 'The Agent cannot make members, only the canvassers can do that.'? If I do then Lanark, like Transport House, will reach its target sometime in the distant future, and not because of its officials, but in spite of them.

When was it Transport House first said they were going out for a Million Individual Membership. Was it not 1946 or 1947? What did they do about it? They announced it to the Press, sent us some leaflets, then forgot about it.

What would a National Membership Secretary do? He would set a target for the country. He would then set one for each constituency, after consulting the Regional Officer. Then he would see that an appeal for membership was made in all literature that was being issued. He would convene meetings or schools, of constituency agents and secretaries, at which reports of work done, or being done, by the constituencies would be given. There could also be discussion on the Agents', Secretaries' or National Secretary's ideas at such meetings.

He could insist on monthly, or two monthly, reports on how campaigning was going in each constituency. He could meet constituencies which were not pulling their weight. He could make a report to each Regional Conference on the progress he was making, and time of Conference should be given to discussing such a report.

If the Labour Party really believes in a mass membership then it must have some

person in Transport House who is responsible for seeing that the membership is obtained. The job cannot be done along with another half dozen.

In my constituency we have 19,500 Labour votes, 5,000 individual Labour members and campaigning for 6,000. We are no different from any other part of the country. We have all the usual distractions: dogs, horses, football, cinemas, dancing, and foreign affairs, but we apply ourselves to the job.

Let us have some of the initiative and ingenuity put in the Membership Campaign that we have seen in the production of the policy discussion pamphlets, then a million members will really become chicken-feed before the next Annual Conference.

SIMON FRASER
Agent, Lanark C.L.P.

(See *Leading Article*)

MORE ORGANISERS

With respect to Len Maynard—twaddle! At a time like this, when the Party is in crying need of an improvement in its organisational staff throughout the country, it seems useless to propose that somebody should be found to fill an office that probably will be found to be surrounded by so many practical obstacles that it will be a case of throwing away badly needed money.

I am well aware that much can be done on the social angle which can be of great aid to a good organisation, but producing plays, etc., on a national basis can be of little value, either to the general organisation of the Party or from a propaganda point of view.

When one thinks of what a few hundred pounds spent in a marginal constituency, like Wycombe, could have meant to us in terms of having had a full-time agent on the spot all the time, Len Maynard's suggestion seems laughable.

R. BREWER,
Hornsey Labour Party.

THOUGHT HE HAD TWO VOTES

by LEN SIMS — NATIONAL AGENT'S DEPARTMENT

THE High Court recently considered the case of an elector who voted twice in the Borough Council elections of 1951 and 1952 and the County Council elections of 1952. This, it was claimed, arose from a misunderstanding of the law relating to the non-resident franchise.

The elector, a trustee and co-owner of property within a Borough, claimed the non-resident vote in respect of the Ward in which the property was situate, and also for residence in another Ward within the Borough. He was registered as a local government elector in both Wards.

Having some doubt as to the position, the elector said that he consulted the Town Clerk on the subject, and was advised that under the provisions of the R.P.A., 1949, he was entitled to exercise both of his votes and he did so.

Section 2 (2) of the Act states:

A person shall not vote as elector more than once in the same electoral area at any local government election. Further, Section 8 of the Act of 1949 goes on to say:

(a) a person shall not be entitled to be registered more than once in any local government area;

(b) a person entitled as a resident to be registered as a local government elector in any local government area shall not be entitled to be so registered as a non-resident.

Sought Relief

On the matter being brought to his attention, and then realising that an illegal practice had been committed, the elector sought relief under the provisions of Section 145 (2) of the Act which reads as follows:

If it is shown to the Court by such evidence as to the Court seems sufficient . . .

(b) that the act or omission arose from inadvertence . . . or from some other reasonable cause of a like nature . . . and in any case did not arise from any want of good faith and under the circumstances it seems to

the Court to be just that either that or any other person should not be subject to any of the consequences under this Act of the act or omission, the Court may make an order allowing the act or omission to be an exception from the provisions of this Act making it an illegal practice, payment, employment or hiring and thereupon no person shall be subject to any of the consequences under this Act of the said act or omission.

Objection Entered

Objection to relief was entered. It was contended that, even after conceding good faith, it was open to the Court to hold that not every mistake in law could constitute 'inadventure', within the meaning of Section 145.

Evidence was given by the Town Clerk, who admitted giving the information which he now realised was based on a misunderstanding of the law in this connection.

It was held that, it being established by *Ex parte Walker* (1889) 22 Q.B.D., 384, that an error committed under a mistake of law could constitute inadventure, it was not possible for the Court to classify such cases of error, classes which are due to inadventure, and classes which were otherwise; so that when in any particular case it was established that the error arose from a mistake of the law, the error must be taken to constitute inadventure, and the Court had jurisdiction to proceed under the Section.

Taking all the relevant facts into consideration, the Court exercised its discretion in favour of the applicant and gave judgment accordingly.

This case, which must have been costly to the elector, indicates the importance of having a clear understanding of the law relating to registration. In Parliamentary elections we have one vote and one vote only—that being based on residence. In local government elections a second vote can be exercised by those holding the necessary qualification, but only when ratepayers in a local government authority *other* than the one in which they are resident.

NTH. BUCKS SELECTS A CANDIDATE

THE Buckingham constituency is a large, scattered, mainly rural constituency. It is nearly forty miles long and thirty miles wide. But it has a tradition of party organisation and activity. In 1945 we won the seat by 3,000 votes, in 1950 we held it by 1,600 votes, but in 1951 we lost it by a miserable 54 votes.

Our candidate, Aidan Crawley, had been selected in 1937, retained in his absence during the war, and then re-adopted for '45, '50, and '51 elections. Early this year, however, he decided not to seek re-adoptions.

We knew that when we sent out the notices asking for nominations of a candidate, we had to select a new man. We were, however, determined to get the best man available.

The method of taking a chance with a few people from the official panel and inviting them to a selection conference was, we felt, not good enough. Eventually we used an unusual method. A list of 'suggested possibles' was obtained from the Regional Office. We had a few personal contacts, and other names were suggested. How then could we sift them out?

Local parties (we have 30) were keen to play their part. They called meetings and invited other parties in the district to attend. At those meetings three or four of the possible candidates spoke. After hearing the speakers the local party decided on whether or not it would nominate one of these men or women it had heard and if so, who it would be.

Not only did the local party members hear the speakers, but members of other parties heard them as well. In this way large numbers of Party members heard

many of the possible nominees, and were able to voice their opinions about them. Eventually, more than twenty possible nominees were considered at more than fifteen meetings.

The possible candidates acted splendidly—for instance one candidate on one night had two meetings more than ten miles apart. Others came quite long distances at their own expense. Several spoke at as many as eight or ten of the meetings. The local parties themselves decided who

by R. Bellchambers

should be the speakers, but the Agent co-ordinated the whole activities in order to give the maximum number a fair hearing.

As the process went on, it produced a terrific surge of enthusiasm throughout the party. The variety of speeches was in itself useful, but the enthusiasm with which meetings were arranged, at a time of the year when it is usually difficult to get anything done in a rural area, was a pleasure to see.

Here was democracy really at work. Literally hundreds of people enthusiastically working to choose the man who would represent them. No 'arrangement', behind closed doors, over a bottle of port for them!

When nominations closed, ten people had been nominated. The Executive Committee met and produced a suggested 'short list' of five. This was put to a General Committee meeting that 120 delegates attended. The 'short list' as a whole was rejected, but when a new one was voted on, exactly the same people recommended previously were selected.

Before the selection conference took place two candidates had withdrawn. The conference (147 delegates) however, decided to go ahead and make a selection. It selected Dr. Gordon Evans.

What are the advantages and the disadvantages of this method of getting a candidate?

First, we found that it was most important to impress on party members at every possible opportunity the fact that whatever the local party decided, when it came to the selection conference, delegates must have a free vote.

Second, we were careful to ensure that the impression was not gained that the

man with the most nomination papers was the 'hot favourite'.

Third, the maximum number of members heard the maximum number of possible nominees. In this way the opinion of members could best be formed.

Even this somewhat exhaustive method had its weak spot. When the forms went out asking for nominations both the *Herald* and *Reynolds* were asked to give us a mention. We felt that this would considerably widen our scope. Neither paper saw fit to help us.

This meant that the only people from whom we could choose were people we knew, or somebody who was connected with the party knew. Alternatively, we could have taken a pin and made a few selections at random from the official list.

Such a situation is just not good enough. The Party must introduce some system whereby many more people know when a particular constituency is selecting a candidate. Why not insert a list in the 'Organiser' headed: 'The following Parties are selecting a candidate, closing date —'.

The honeymoon period of 1946-47 is now over, candidates are in much shorter supply, and it is of vital importance that constituencies know of all available talent. We cannot afford to retain a system which is based on knowing somebody who knows somebody, who knows what is going on—one might just as well use a jungle drum instead of the telephone.

North Bucks is to be congratulated on taking such care in selecting its prospective candidate, but after casting its net so wide, it chose a local man!

Mr. Bellchambers can feel grateful that neither the *Herald* nor *Reynolds* acted on his proposal to publish the invitation for aspirants to apply. If they had, it is likely that he would have been overwhelmed with applications, most of which would have come from entirely unsuitable persons, including not a few 'crackpots' and 'carpet-baggers'.

Annual Conference has decided on the method by which Constituency Labour Parties looking for a candidate may be advised of those who are available for

consideration. There are two lists: List A consists of those who are on the official Parliamentary Panels of affiliated Trade Unions; List B consists of those who have been nominated by Constituency Labour Parties and nationally affiliated organisations.

Those whose names appear upon the Lists must have had at least one year's individual membership of the Labour Party. Each nominee supplies particulars of himself, gives references and most of them are interviewed by a Party officer. All the names have received the approval of the National Executive Committee.

It is true that the biographical details appearing on the Lists are only a brief summary of the particulars supplied, but they do indicate the person's qualification and background. If the information is insufficient for a choice to be made the National Agent is willing to suggest names of those whom he thinks are worthy of consideration. For obvious reasons he is not prepared to do this unless invited to do so.—EDITOR.

Unwanted Election

LUCCOMBE, a West Somersetshire village, has had to pay the sum of £21 14s. 9d. on a poll they did not want—and certainly could not afford—and elected a man who did not wish to stand.

As six nominations were received for the five seats on the Parish Council, a Mr. Greig arranged to withdraw. His papers stated that to do so would mean sending in a notice of withdrawal by noon on the twelfth day before day of election. Mr. Greig sent in his withdrawal on the thirteenth day—as he thought—but, alas, he was told that Sundays and Bank Holidays did not count and therefore the withdrawal was too late and the contest must be held.

To quote Mr. Greig's own words: 'This had farcical and Gilbertian results—as I did not wish to stand, my friends did not vote for me. Apparently, however, I had more enemies than I supposed, and I was elected.'



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BLAZING THE NORTHERN TRAIL

by WILLIAM MARSHALL—SCOTTISH ORGANISER

WHEN I was asked to write an article on any organising experiences it occurred to me that a good story could be told about the Highlands and Islands of Scotland.

I decided to try and tell in my own way a story of progress by the Labour Party, in what is probably the most difficult, and certainly the most scattered, terrain in the United Kingdom.

When I was appointed Assistant Organiser in Scotland, part of my job was to try and organise and stimulate the forces of Labour in the Highlands and Islands constituencies, and to try and introduce more and more electors there to Labour and Socialist ideas and ideals.

Imagine the contrasts. From the Mull of Kintyre in the south of Argyllshire, where I found palm trees growing, and north to the Island of Unst, in the far-away Shetlands, where I saw baby seals basking in the summer sun, only a few miles away from the Arctic Circle.

It took nearly three years to complete the assignment to visit every part of the area. I used almost every known form of transport. The aeroplane, the steamship, the ferryboat, the launch and the rowboat to travel among the islands; the train, bus, car, pony drawn governess car were all enlisted. Once, I did a journey on horseback, but nature has not provided me with adequate upholstery for this sort of thing, so I more frequently used the ancient Shank's mare.

Gaelic Enthusiasm

There were the long trails north and west through Caithness and Sutherland in preparation for the by-election which did not come. The exciting meetings with crofters in the little townships, the Gaelic enthusiasm, the bush telegraph system set up to convey messages over moor and mountain, and the formation of the Knights of St. Crispin, as we called the village shoemakers who acted as our contact points throughout the straths and glens.

Then there was Alec Mathieson, with the telegraphic address of 'Electric' Canisbay, who organised the wide crofting area around John o' Groats on a bi-

cycle and who sold his sheep in order to provide funds for the Labour Party. And not least, was the satirical retorts of Mackay Mackay at open-air meetings.

Then there was my first meeting in Ross and Cromarty in Dingwall on 1st April, 1947. Not quite the Ides of March! Only four persons attended. This was the full Party strength. There were very few Trade Union branches in the Highlands then.

They were in debt to the extent of £183—loans obtained to pay the General Election expenses of 1945. By 6th June that year, we had cleared off the debts, and set up Polling District Committees in almost every town and township, and by December, 1950, this Party had won the Individual Membership Shield for Scotland, with a membership of 997. The Labour vote in the 1950 General Election was 6,521.

To Skye

Then in succession to Inverness-shire, with its area of well over a million acres. To the Isle of Skye, which is in this constituency. To Argyllshire and the Islands of Mull, Islay and Jura; visiting the miners at Machrihanish the fishermen at Carradale; the crofters at Kintyre; the forestry workers near Dunoon and the Labour strongholds of Campbeltown and Kinlochleven.

Kinlochleven lies half in Argyllshire and half in Inverness-shire. It is an industrial township which appears as an anachronism beside a beautiful Highland loch. Here the local Labour stalwarts were anxious to establish the village as a local government unit with the status of a small burgh.

When I demonstrated the necessity of having to link up with either Inverness or Argyll county council for major administrative purposes, the argument which developed threatened to end in another massacre of Glencoe! To ally themselves with Inverness-shire meant 'Bowing the knee to Cameron of Lochiel' the Highland chieftain. Never! Blood would flow first. Ancient clan rivalries got an airing that night!

I got a great kick out of organising the first county council by-election fight ever to take place in Shetland. It was for the

district of Unst, the most northerly part of the British Isles. The Labour Candidate was elected! A Labour gain! We have now twelve Labour members in the County Council of Zetland.

My first visit to the Western Isles was in 1950. From all over the Islands delegates travelled to Stornoway to meet me. It was most exhilarating. This is the best organised constituency in Britain—at least for electoral purposes. But the book approach does not do here. The postal vote, the system of interisland communication, the marked register all organised with real Hebridean artistry.

The only pub in the Islands is at Stornoway. Many of the delegates had not seen a pub for two or three years. Thirst is an awful thing!

With all this wandering and building up organisation went your humble servant as a lone propagandist, even explorer and pioneer, but soon to be accepted as an adopted Highlander. I was extremely proud of the honour of being elected an honorary member of the Burravoe Debating Society, on the Island of Yell in the Shetlands, and more particularly to be proposed for this honour by John Rendall, one of the original Industrial Workers of the World members, who saw imprisonment and persecution in Australia, in the early years of the century.

Gradually, with zeal, method and persistence (to quote my old friend and comrade Harold Croft) a working organisation

was formed over the Highlands and Islands.

We now have an Annual Highlands and Islands Conference of Constituency Labour Parties. At first these conferences dealt mainly with Party Organisation and the Conduct of Elections.

We began to secure representation on the local authorities. We already had one Labour M.P.—Mr. Malcolm MacMillan for the Western Isles. Then demands grew for policy discussions. National policy was featured at our Highland Conferences, and Joe Westwood, Arthur Woodburn and Tom Fraser in turn, as Scottish Ministers, attended and addressed the delegates.

Policy Proposals

The most recent development arose out of a resolution from the Highlands calling on the Scottish Executive, in consultation with the Highlands and Islands constituencies, to prepare in pamphlet form policy proposals for Highland and Island development.

This has been done, and I look forward with exceptional interest to our next Scottish Annual Conference, and to the discussions on this document, which has evolved from many debates, many journeys, many revelations and many ideas. By the refinement of many minds there has been produced a socialist signpost for further advances in the far-flung territories of the Scottish Highlands and Islands.

NEW AGENCY APPOINTMENTS

THE National Executive Committee has recently approved the following Agency appointments.

W. S. BLACK fills the vacancy at West Gloucestershire caused by the retirement of Mr. C. W. Luker. Aged 37, Mr. Black was formerly an insurance agent and held most local Party offices at Earby in Yorkshire. Two years ago he was appointed Agent to the Banbury Constituency Party, and takes up his new duties on the 1st January.

H. HODSON to Ilford South. For the past six years Harold Hodson has been employed by the London Co-operative Society Political Committee as Agent in Ilford North. Since 1924 he has held almost every office at local and constitu-

ency Party level. He has assisted in many by-elections and been in control of the Parliamentary elections in Ilford North since 1945.

E. J. JONES to Eye. A regular soldier from 1931 to 1945, ending as R.S.M., Edward Jones has been active in the Stowmarket Local Labour Party. His Army administrative experience and his knowledge of the constituency should greatly assist him in this, his first Agency.

D. H. MERRY to Worcester. For the past two years Dennis Merry has been Assistant Organiser to the Birmingham Borough Labour Party. During that period he has acted as Secretary to the Hall Green Constituency Labour Party. At the 1951 General Election he acted as Election Agent in that constituency.

CHARLIE LUKER EASES UP

MANY profound truths have been hit upon by sheer accident, and the Black Country man who said in perfect seriousness, "Me father was an Englishman, and me mother came from the Forest o' Dean, Glaustershire," was wiser than he was aware of. For those who know the natives of the Forest intimately have learnt that this little tract of territory contains a distinct and insular community within the British Nation with an identity of its own. Generally they do not run to size, but are sturdily built and tough in muscle and mind. They hold with fierce tenacity to what they believe to be right, even when they are wrong. If any doubt this, let him discuss a difference with the Executive Council of the Dean Miners' Association.

Of such stock is Ald. C. W. Luker, J.P., C.C., who is never addressed by his titles and is "Charlie" to a host of colleagues and friends. A milestone in his life gives an excuse to one who has known him for thirty years to pay a brief tribute to the substantial contribution Charlie has made to the Movement in the West Country.

Coal Miner

Like most of the lads of the Forest, he went underground, and worked as a coal miner for thirty years. During this period he played an active part in Trade Union work. His political and public activities also started at a youthful age, for he became a Member of the West Dean Rural District Council in 1917, little knowing that he was destined to serve as Chairman of that Authority for 24 years without challenge.

Elected to the Gloucestershire County Council in 1922, he has given a generation of effective service there, and being re-elected an Alderman this year he is set for more work until 1958. For several years he was Vice-Chairman, which entailed membership of all Council Com-

mittees, but his main responsibility has been the Chairmanship of the Highways Committee, and although he did the surfacing by proxy it was thoroughly well done, as every driver will testify.

Charlie was already firmly established in public life when in 1922 he was appointed half-time Secretary and Agent to the Forest of Dean D.L.P. For another ten years he worked half-time in the Constituency and half-time in the coal pit. In 1932 he became Constituency Agent under the standard conditions and so continued for twenty years.

In at Birth

In the course of his manifold tasks in this office, including the successful conduct of the campaign in each General Election, he may occasionally have recalled that he was in at the birth of the old Labour Representation Committee for the constituency, in the little group of men and women who possessed the faith that had moved mountains.

Even a Constituency Agent needs some recreation—although there are those who will feel that this declaration smacks of heresy—and Charlie Luker sought diversion in pre-war years by taking charge of important departments in Parliamentary By-Elections in Monmouth, Swindon, Erdington and Lichfield. He was Secretary of the Gloucestershire Federation of Labour Parties for a mere twenty years, and audited the accounts of the Agents' Union for nearly the same period. He has always been reticent about what he did in his spare time.

And now his doctor has told him somewhat firmly that he must reduce the rate of expenditure of his energy, and as coolly and methodically as he does everything he is attending to this advice. He has relinquished the appointment of Agent, and cut down the wide range of his commitments in the Rural District and the County; but the Shirehall will still see much of him, for, doctor or no doctor, he does not intend to turn to a life of slipped idleness.

His many friends—it is difficult to imagine he has any enemies—will hope that this easing-up will lengthen the period of his further solid contribution to the administration of the affairs of Gloucester.

$14 \times 20 = 650$

BAD arithmetic? No! Just another Membership Campaign! It had taken some time slowly to build up the membership of the East Walthamstow Constituency Labour Party and to make each Polling Area strong enough to sustain the membership gained in this way. Then came the urge to make a really big effort to double our membership of 1,400. The question was could the organisation take the strain?

The plan outlined herewith was put before the Executive Committee, they approved, and all the Polling Area secretaries, Ward secretaries, and Ward organisers were called to a meeting. The scheme was explained, and the evenings of Tuesdays and Thursdays selected for canvassing and the starting areas in each ward were chosen. Volunteers were called for at the Ward meetings, and their names and addresses taken.

It was decided to call on one quarter of the area's 'favourables', living in adjacent roads, at each canvass. A membership leaflet was addressed to all 'favourable' families, whose names and addresses were then written up on a duplicated canvass sheet. The name of the road, and the number of calls (about twelve) were written on the outside of the sheet.

Area secretaries were given a week's notice of the date of delivery of the membership leaflets, which took place two or three days previous to the canvass. Canvassers were notified of the meeting-place for the next week's canvass each week-end.

After the first two nights it was found possible to do 18 calls, instead of the original 12 for each pair of canvassers.

(continued from page 18)

shire and especially to the welfare of his fellow-countrymen of the Forest.

Such a career as Charlie Luker's is its own testimony and needs no flattering appraisal. It may truly be said of him that he never sought publicity and never shirked service. Always he has spent himself generously for the Cause, and now he is required to conserve his energy one may hope he will account for many more years yet of good and faithful service.

The call backs of Tuesday night were added to Thursday's work, and the call backs after Thursday were left to the Area secretary.

An average turn-out of 14 comrades each evening, plus the six extra calls kept us within sight of our estimated number of calls for each group of areas. In 20 evenings, or 10 weeks, we have canvassed the area twice.

Where newly-made members wanted to pay their membership subscription, a receipt was given and this receipt was collected by the Area secretary when the membership card was issued. This call also enabled the Area secretary to contact likely workers.

The cost of printing, stationery, postage and new cards will be fully covered by the subscriptions taken in two months.

One snag is that many of the membership leaflets delivered have been mislaid by the time the canvassers call, so canvassers were given a good supply of spare leaflets.

The results were pleasing. Six hundred and fifty new members were enrolled. The organisation has taken the strain and the three months until the end of February will enable the growing membership of the local areas to be prepared for the second half of the canvass.

I spent twenty nights at street corners, handing out the canvass sheets, extra leaflets, receipts, torches, and when the canvassers returned, checking the sheets for call backs, and totalling the members made. (They wouldn't leave before they knew the score.) I enjoyed it, even when it was wet and cold. They are grand comrades. Their enthusiasm keeps you warm.

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